

BOOK REVIEW

Marrying Well: The Clinician's Guide to Premarital Counseling

Elena Lesser Braun, Anne F Ziff. New York, NY: W W Norton, 2010. ISBN-13: 978-0-39370-594-2. Price: £19.99. Pages: 280 (hardback)

In an era where marriage is still looked upon with approval and appreciation there is also a real fear that divorce rates are the highest ever. A newly married couple therefore have much riding on their preparation for the time ahead – those who fail to appreciate the various aspects that actually build a good marriage soon find themselves wondering if they 'married well' after all.

Traditionally, couple counselling has been used when marriages or committed relationships falter under the stress of everyday ups and downs. There has been little attention paid to helping clients learn to choose well in the first place so that there is greater self-awareness and a better understanding of what they bring to a committed relationship.

This book addresses the much needed gap in the information and awareness of premarital counselling in helping couples to choose and marry well. The authors

discuss the history of marriage and the reasons why marriage/couple counselling has only recently acquired the responsibility of helping couples choose well before the marriage and hence prevent possible problems that could lead to divorce. There is a detailed discussion of who the clients are likely to be, what factors predict a satisfying marriage, common premarital problems and a guide to identifying the various premarital stages. Throughout the book there are a variety of case studies to illustrate the points under discussion and many of them are revealing either because we have come across them in client work or more than likely to have experienced them in our own relationships, old or new. The authors have drawn on their wide experience of counselling, education, teaching and research to present a convincing case for offering premarital counselling to all those who wish to go down the path of 'marriage'. The authors use the term 'marriage' particularly for those couples who are already committed but have reached the stage where they wish to take the commitment one step further and formalise it. They also describe how a variety of clients approach them seeking help in overcoming past behaviour patterns that end up in destructive relationships or difficulty with finding the elusive 'right

one'. The material presented is certainly useful for anyone who counsels couples or individuals looking for meaningful and rewarding intimate relationships.

The book is very readable and interesting and I certainly found it hard to put down. It was wonderful to have so much information and advice available in one source. The techniques used to counsel clients are also very well described and lend themselves to use by counsellors and clinicians alike. Much of the material is of use to me in my psychosexual work too, and although I was aware of most of what the authors talk about, I have never before had all the information together in one place with the relevant references to hand. The book is primarily aimed at counsellors but I thoroughly recommend the book to counsellors, clinicians and anyone who, while being studious, also likes to 'play Cupid' and wishes to find out more about what constitutes good preparatory homework for those looking to 'marry well'.

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